

29 APR 1973

Approved For Release 2005/01/13 : CIA-RDP88-01350R000200030036-2

BOOK WORLD

H- KARNOW, STANLEY
 P- Burchett, Wilfred
 3020030036-2 my war with the CIA
 Sihanouk, Norodom

The War After Vietnam

MY WAR WITH THE CIA:
*The Memoirs of Prince Norodom
 Sihanouk, as related to Wilfred
 Burchett. Pantheon. 273 pp. \$7.95*

**CAMBODIA IN THE SOUTH-
 EAST ASIAN WAR.** By Malcolm
 Caldwell and Lek Tan. Preface
 by Noam Chomsky. Monthly Re-
 view. 446 pp. \$15

By STANLEY KARNOW

IT MUST BE CLEAR by now that President Nixon's invasion of Cambodia three years ago was one of the most futile and tragic actions of the entire American involvement in Indochina. It was largely designed to eliminate the North Vietnamese and Vietcong sanctuaries in the eastern Cambodian provinces adjoining Vietnam. Yet today virtually the whole country, with the exception of its principal towns and uninhabitable areas, is controlled by insurgent forces opposed to the government headed by Marshal Lon Nol. The government, which would collapse in a matter of minutes without U.S. aid, is corrupt and inept. The insurgent ranks have grown in spectacular fashion since 1970, and only the American B-52s, which have turned one-third of Cambodia's six million people into refugees, have prevented their total takeover. It is, in short, a dismal story—made all the more pathetic because it was avoidable. Nixon's thrust into Cambodia widened the battlefield. It hardly shortened the war since, in one form or another, the war goes on.

The incident that opened Cambodia to the U.S. invasion was the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk by Lon Nol and other subordinates in March 1970. Sihanouk had managed until then to keep his vulnerable country out of the Indochina conflict by deft and sometimes baffling diplomatic maneuvers. He played off the Russians, Chinese,

Americans and Vietnamese against each other, often with dazzling skill. Ironically, he was leaning closer to the United States when his fall came. And even more ironically, the Nixon administration is now persuaded that no settlement in Cambodia is possible without a role for Sihanouk.

Sihanouk's memoir, written with the help of the Australian left-wing journalist Wilfred Burchett, is as unfortunate as its title. It is true that Sihanouk was threatened on past occasions by plots concocted with Central Intelligence Agency connivance. In 1959, when his neutralism was regarded as too immoral for John Foster Dulles, the CIA planned and subsidized an operation aimed at trigger-

ing a revolt against him in the western Cambodian province of Battambang. A CIA agent by the name of Victor Matsui, who is still functioning somewhere in the world, was caught in the act and expelled. But for Sihanouk to blame all his troubles on the CIA is far too simplistic. There is no doubt that the Pentagon was anxious to drive into Cambodia, and it is equally plausible that Lon Nol and other Cambodian military men were eager to bring in the Americans in order to reap fat profits like their neighboring South

Vietnamese and Thai colleagues. Yet the coup d'état that ousted Sihanouk was not merely a conspiracy.

Much of the fault for his ouster lay with Sihanouk himself. Brilliant and versatile as he was, he failed to appreciate that an urban middle class was emerging in Cambodia and losing patience with his one-man rule. The bourgeoisie of Phnom Penh would never have conspired to oust him. But they welcomed his downfall at the time—little realizing that it would plunge their country into war. In Paris, as the clamor against him spiraled, Sihanouk made another error. Instead of returning home immediately to resume command, he traveled on to Moscow and Peking, and has been an exile in the Chinese capital since. In a sense, he lost by default.

Although it contains a good deal of useful information—the passages on Soviet-Cambodian relations are especially intriguing—the Sihanouk book lacks depth. It overlooks his problems with the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, and it avoids any real account of his relations with the Cambodian

leftists, whom he earlier persecuted and with whom he now collaborates. But then, it may be too much to expect a deposed chief of state to produce an objective autobiography—particularly when he is still struggling to regain his authority. So it remains for historians to tell the story.

Caldwell and Tan are not those historians even though their book is filled with valuable detail. It suffers from a consistent left-wing bias, and, like the Sihanouk memoir, it tends to take the conspiratorial view of history. Thus the visit to Cambodia in late 1967 of

Jacqueline Kennedy, a significant event that contributed to easing tensions between the United States and Cambodia, is treated as a kind of American plot. It is true, as the authors point out, that Sihanouk invited Jackie and later received a more business-like mission headed by Chester Bowles as a way of buying time against the possibility of an American military invasion during that period. But what they neglect to say is that these overtures to Sihanouk were also promoted by U.S. officials who sought to prevent the invasion. Some high-ranking State Department officials were later courageous enough to oppose the invasion of Cambodia even when it became President Nixon's strategy.

Working mainly from newspaper clippings, a dangerous source of information for historians, the authors commit mistakes that somehow fit their bias. For example, they cite the then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs William Bundy as saying in early 1968 that the United States reserved the right to send troops into Cambodia from Vietnam. In reality, Bundy was misquoted by the French News Agency at the time and Sihanouk, who had blown up at the earlier statement, calmed down when he read the accurate text. It was this writer, incidentally, who gave Sihanouk the correct version of the Bundy remarks.

But current histories of Cambodia may be irrelevant in the face of the present situation in that benighted country. It may not matter whether Sihanouk is subjective or his sympathizers partial. The main fact is that Cambodia is being devastated along with Laos and like Vietnam, and the inadequacy of books is of minor consequence compared to that tragedy.

STANLEY KARNOW, the author of *Mao and China: From Revolution to Revolution*, is a contributing editor of *The New Republic* and a consultant to ABC News.

CIA 4 CAMBODIA
 CIA 104 MATSUI, Victor

Approved For Release 2005/01/13 : CIA-RDP88-01350R000200030036-2

SOUTHEAST ASIAN WAR